

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## Covert OPS: Guatemala 1954

- Standard: I. Culture  
II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
III. People, Places, and Environments  
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions  
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance  
VIII. Science, Technology, and Society  
IX. Global Connections  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices
- Grade Level: 9–12
- Objectives: The student will:
- Analyze the role of the United States in Guatemala's 1954 *coup d'état*
  - Assess the use of covert operations in another country
  - Simulate covert operations in Guatemala
  - Determine the effects of the 1954 coup on Guatemala's future
  - Evaluate the role of ethics in foreign policy
- Time: 2–3 class periods
- Materials: Documents: **1953** *Guatemala: A Serious Threat to the Hemisphere*  
**1954** *The Story of a Covert Operation*
- Resources: *Action Cards 1–11* (from *The Story of a Covert Operation*)  
*Action Card 12*  
*Action Card 13*  
*Action Card 14*  
*Persons and Pseudonyms*  
*Abbreviations and Cryptonyms*  
*Map: Western Hemisphere*
- Exercises: *Covert OPS Assignments*
- Access to:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954\\_Guatemalan\\_coup\\_d%27%C3%A9tat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954_Guatemalan_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat)
- Procedures:

### *Setting the Stage*

What did it take to apply the Monroe Doctrine during the Cold War? If you answer “suspected Communist leanings by a president of Guatemala,” you are correct. Communism in Central America, where U.S. politics held sway and American businesses flourished, was not acceptable. An orchestrated *coup d'état* of the suspected Communist government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was deemed necessary. Students will discover how this operation (Code name: PBSUCCESS) was done.

*Pre-Activity*

**1.** Assign these roles to groups of 4–5 students:

- a.** Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- b.** Department of State
- c.** Department of Defense
- d.** Guatemalan rebels—contact is RUFUS (RUFUS is the cryptonym or code name for Carlos Castillo Armas, rebel leader)
- e.** Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and his government

(*Note to teacher:* The role of CIA Director, Allen W. Dulles, is a pivotal selection. The Director will conduct the rounds of discussions among the groups. You may consider certain students for this role prior to the activity.)

**2.** Have students read the document, *Guatemala: A Serious Threat to the Hemisphere*, and complete their *Covert OP Assignments* exercise prior to class. (*Note:* Obviously this CIA document would NOT have been available to all of these people. However, for class purposes, it is valuable “background material” for all groups concerned.)

**3.** An additional source, with more specific details about the coup, is at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954\\_Guatemalan\\_coup\\_d'%C3%A9tat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954_Guatemalan_coup_d'%C3%A9tat) All students would benefit from this information, particularly RUFUS and Arbenz. Tell RUFUS and Arbenz in advance that their actions during the coup are described in more detail in this article. All groups will receive prepared Action Cards. The CIA, State, and Defense groups may use this article as well.

**4.** Arrange desks in groups or stations with signs on each labeled:

- CIA - PBSUCCESS,
- Department of State
- Department of Defense
- RUFUS, leader Guatemalan Rebels
- President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman of Guatemala.

**5.** Arrange to project a political map of the Western Hemisphere on the board/wall during the activity.

**6.** Print copies of the *ACTION CARDS* for the groups.

*Activity: Covert Operation - PBSUCCESS*

**1.** Project the *Map: Western Hemisphere*.

**2.** Have students sit with their assigned group.

**3.** Have students place their homework, *Covert OP Assignments*, on their desks. They will use this as reference.

4. Have copies of the resources, **Persons and Pseudonyms** and *Abbreviations and Cryptonyms* on desks of students.
5. Groups should select members to be the Director of the CIA, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, RUFUS, and President Arbenz.
6. Write "PBSUCCESS" on the board.
7. Have the Director of the CIA explain that PBSUCCESS is the code name for the covert operation to overthrow President Arbenz of Guatemala.
8. Distribute the *Action Cards* to each group for reading. Explain that Action Cards 1–11 are directly from CIA Top Secret Documents (now declassified.) Action Cards 12–14 provide additional information. Students will use these Cards to describe and defend their behavior before and during the coup.
9. Allow time for students to consult the *Persons and Pseudonyms* and *Abbreviations and Cryptonyms* to decipher their Action Cards when necessary.
10. Have the Director of the CIA orchestrate the following rounds of discussion.
  - a. Round 1: Reasons to depose President Arbenz of Guatemala

One person in each group should make a statement that describes their current situation. Students should speak in the first person and passionately describe the actual predicaments prior to the 1954 Guatemalan coup. The CIA, State, and Defense departments will explain why the U.S. Government fears the Communist leanings of President Arbenz.

(*Note:* Continue rounds with each group, or the most appropriate group at that point in the historical account, taking the lead in making comments about its latest actions. The chronology of the 1954 coup should dictate the rounds and comments. They are DEFENDING their participation in PBSUCCESS, or in the case of Arbenz, defending his rights as president and the right of his country to defy a U.S.–sponsored invasion. Students should improvise as the discussion proceeds. All groups MAY speak in each round.)
  - b. Round 2: Planning the Invasion
  - c. Round 3: The Invasion
  - d. Round 4: The Aftermath of the Coup
11. When discussion wanes, have the CIA Director call an end to the activity.
12. Distribute copies of *The Official Story*, written 20–years later for students to read for homework. (The last two pages of *The Story of a Covert Operation*.)

*Debriefing the Activity*

- 1.** Summarize the reasons for U.S. involvement in Guatemala's affairs.
- 2.** Justify American involvement in Guatemala's affairs.
- 3.** Would the coup in 1954 have occurred without the assistance of the United States?
- 4.** Make a brief statement defending the Arbenz' government vs its overthrow by elements in Guatemala allied with the United States.
- 5.** Make a brief statement defending the role of the United States in the overthrow of Arbenz.
- 6.** What domestic and international events were pressing the Communist "fear button" in the United States?
- 7.** Should the United States become involved in the internal affairs of another country—anywhere?
- 8.** Refer to *The Official Story*. What assessments were made by the CIA about the Guatemalan Coup in 1975 ?
- 9.** What do we know now about the coup?
- 10.** Since the Cold War era, the U.S. Government—in particular Congress—has exercised some oversight (policing) over the actions of the CIA. Ask students if this was necessary? Can they think of executive orders or oversight provisions that should be used with the CIA?
- 11.** The code name for the CIA overthrow of Arbenz was PBSUCCESS. Identify the successes, failures, and repercussions of this operation. ■